

## Slow food

*Trend to think about food choices gaining ground in the South*

BY ANDRIA LISLE

**T**he Slow Food movement, which simultaneously promotes regional food traditions and a cultural shift from industrialized food systems, has finally made it to Memphis.

Begun in Italy in 1986 as an outreach to consumers searching for local alternatives to a homogenized, fast food culture, the international Slow Food organization has grown to a worldwide membership of 80,000-plus people in 100 countries.

FedEx Corp. programmer Paul Knipple, who, with his wife Angela and son Patric, maintains the food-related blog Squirrel Squad Squeaks (<http://Squirrel-Squad.Blogspot.com>), had just joined Slow Food USA when they got news of a local chapter helmed by Kjeld Petersen.

"The first e-mail we got as official members was, 'Welcome to the Memphis Convivium,'" Knipple recalls. "It was very ironic, because we were looking into starting a group here. Kjeld, his wife Melissa, and the rest of the board were already working on it, so it was perfect timing."

With Slow Food Memphis and their brand-new quarterly magazine *Edible Memphis*, the Petersens — recent transplants from Portland, Ore. — are galvanizing local food lovers already roused by the Memphis Farmers Market and programs sponsored by the Southern Foodways Alliance located

in Oxford, Miss.

They're organizing events like A Taste of the Garden, a family workshop series held at the Memphis Botanic Garden, dinners at restaurants like the Inn at Hunt Phelan, and garden tours in Victorian Village.

On Sept. 8, cookbook author and *The Commercial Appeal* food writer Jennifer Chandler and horticulturist Chris Cosby will co-host an A Taste of the Garden salad workshop at the Memphis Botanic Garden, the last of a four-part Slow Food series that has featured Brian Reed of Crave Catering, Interim Restaurant & Bar chef Jackson Kramer and Sabine Baltz of Fratelli's in the Garden.

"Our initial idea was to get kids interested in where their food comes from," Melissa Petersen says. "We thought we'd get a few chefs to come in and cook and plant the ingredients in the garden. So far, though, we've pulled in a lot of curious adults."

According to Jana Gilbertson, director of marketing at the Memphis Botanic Garden, their outreach program perfectly dovetails with the mission of Slow Food.

"A lot of our focus is on connecting people with nature, espe-

**Taste of the Garden Family Cooking Workshop**  
Date: Sept. 8  
Time: 10 a.m.-noon  
Venue: Memphis Botanic Garden  
Cost: \$6 for adults, \$4 for children  
Web site: [www.memphisbotanicgarden.com](http://www.memphisbotanicgarden.com)

**Slow Food Memphis**  
Web site: [www.slowfoodmemphis.com](http://www.slowfoodmemphis.com)

**Edible Memphis Magazine**  
Web site: [www.ediblememphis.com](http://www.ediblememphis.com)

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Tomato expert Bill Colvard speaks at a 'Taste of the Garden' event while chef Jackson Kramer looks on.

MELISSA PETERSEN

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cially children," Gilbertson says. "So far, A Taste of the Garden has been hugely popular with folks who like to go to the farmers' market, and it's something the whole family can do together."

"My phone's been ringing off the hook. Honestly, this and our Wednesday afternoon farmers' market has really taken off."

Slow Food is a vehicle for getting people interested in food, Melissa Petersen says.

"It's for supporting efforts like farmers and community gardens, and for finding like-minded people interested in food traditions. Some members are all about gardening, some are about the farmer-chef connections, and some are like, 'When do we eat next?'" she says, laughing.

Oxford resident John T. Edge, director of Southern Foodways Alliance, is a charter member of Slow Food Memphis.

He cites the Petersens' organizational energy and the "dawning sense" that food choices matter deeply as two catalysts for the trend, which is taking hold not only in Memphis, but from coast to coast.

"For the longest time, Americans saw food as fuel, but chefs and restaurateurs are understanding the value of having their own farms," Edge says.

"In some ways, the South has a head start on rekindling the interest in regional food systems, because compared to the rest of the nation, we were more rural, more agricultural, for a longer time."

Some of the fascination, Edge admits, is faddish. The trend is, in fact, underscored by the bevy of books on the topic, which range from Barbara Kingsolver's current New York Times bestseller *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, and Edge's own *Southern Belly: The Ultimate Food Lover's Companion to the South*.

Life couldn't be better for Knipple, who is still posting photos of a recent family vacation to Houston to take in the Southern Foodways Alliance's Potlikker Film Festival. He took a food lover's tour of southern Louisiana that included visits to Billeaud's grocery store in Broussard, the Blue Dog Cafe in Lafayette, and Jim's Kountry Pies in Coteau.

"Every vacation we've taken as a family has been structured around food," Knipple says. "If I can do my bit to reach out to a great farmer, to connect with people to raise more produce or more beef, then that's so much more good food for us."

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COURTESY MELISSA PETERSEN

Kjeld and Melissa Petersen started the Memphis chapter of Slow Food USA.

## Get food educated in 'Edible,' at annual symposium

BY ANDRIA LISLE

Interested in becoming a member of Slow Food Memphis? Attend a general meeting, held monthly at Otherlands Coffee in Cooper-Young, drop by the organization's booth at the Memphis Farmers Market, or, for \$60, join via the group's Web site.

To learn more about local foods, pick up a copy of *Edible Memphis*, which is edited by Melissa Petersen and available at dozens of locations around town, including Burke's Book Store and Davis-Kidd, Mantia's, the Wine Market and the public library.

And, just because summer's over doesn't mean it's time to quit supporting local produc-

ers. The Memphis Farmers Market is slated to stay open through November, while Slow Food Memphis has events planned throughout the rest of the year. You can also attend a cooking class at the Viking Cooking School, at Wild Oats, or at local shops like Forty Carrots.

The Southern Foodways Alliance's 10th annual symposium, the State of Southern Food, is scheduled for the end of October. The week-end-long event will be held on the University of Mississippi campus. Legendary California-based food doyenne Alice Waters, a supporter of edible education programs, is slotted in as a guest speaker.

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